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ABSTRACT

The connection between Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) and literature is discussed with examples of technical vocabulary drawn from a variety of writers, with particular attention to a sketch by the British dramatist Harold Pinter, "Trouble in the Works," which makes extensive use of the terminology of machine parts. It is noted that within certain occupational groups, terms for tools in particular have given rise of songs describing work processes but having a dual signification. This has subverted the truism that in LSP there must be a one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified by extending the semantic range, particularly in the field of metaphor. Taken together, the examples suggest that writers who are alert to nuances of language find in LSP a closed system that can be appropriated as a means to other ends. The writers offer a coherent group of texts, initially at least, that are more easily studied by technical students than by humanists. Contains 5 references. (Author/LB)

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MACHINE PARTS AS METAPHOR

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The interface of LSP and literature has been little studied, yet writers from Goethe to Harold Pinter and e.e. cummings have made extensive use of technical vocabulary. Within certain occupational groups, terms for tools in particular have given rise to a rich oral culture of songs describing work processes but having a dual signification. This has subverted the truism that in LSP there must be a one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified by extending the semantic range, particularly in the field of metaphor. Taken together, these examples suggest that writers alert to nuances of language find in LSP a closed system that can be appropriated as a means to other ends. Pedagogically speaking, these writers offer a coherent group of texts which technical students are initially better equipped than humanists to study.

Literature courses are often faced with the hard truth that many students experience a feeling of panic at the prospect of discussing literature. It is felt that literary criticism has developed its own terminology (not in fact true) and that it is an area in which modes of analysis from other fields cannot be applied without radical reconstruction. Thus a linguistic study of James Joyce will be prefaced by elaborate apologies that no attempt is being made to clip the wings of 'his soaring imagination', while sociological studies of the milieu of the writer must be accompanied by obligatory references to 'timeless values'. Such clichés suggest that there is a basic contradiction between a concern that literary analysis should be as rigorous in its parameters as that in other fields, and a belief that its raw material, the sacred 'texts', are somehow above the hurly burly of changing times. Although Roland Barthes has demonstrated the protean nature of apparently stable texts, the pedagogical problem still remains of how to integrate literary studies successfully into a course of studies that may include a range of related fields such as sociolinguistics, cultural studies, pragmatics and stylistics.

In this context, it is important to realise that writers themselves have long

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availed themselves of the many varieties of language that are only now being identified and studied. In English this includes George Eliot's use of dialect, which is central to her philosophy of the wholly integrated individual, and Hemingway's use of 'translated Spanish' as a means of emphasising the multi-cultural society of the Florida Keys.

This article will examine one of the 'Englishes' that occupies a significant field of literature, where the LSP of modern technology is used for metaphorical purposes.The practice is evidently as old as the Industrial Revolution.In his conversations with Eckermann, Goethe mentions an English poem on geology : King Coal sits surrounded by other minerals, including his consort Pyrites and Countess Porphyry. It is, Goethe comments with approval, 'calculated to amuse people while at the same time it diffuses a quantity of useful information' (Eckermann 1930: 65). The preoccupation with geology has been maintained to the present. Hugh MacDiarmid, working within the Celtic tradition of philosophical poems with dense scientific content, used such terms in *Depth and the Chthonian Image*.

Goethe's English poem was evidently a *jeu d'esprit* . However, the incorporation of occupational terms into literary works is linked to the impact of the Industrial Revolution and, specifically, the rise of literary realism. You can learn a dozen trades by reading Tolstoy. Later there were parallel allusive movements in architecture and painting, including constructivism and cubism, and a renewed surge of borrowings in recent years associated with postmodernist works.

This coopting of terms could surprise only the most orthodox New Critic. Roman Jakobson showed that metaphor is one of the two primary operations of human language, condensing two meanings together by raiding other fields (Eagleton 1983: 99). Inevitably, the direction of metaphor creation is usually from the concrete to the abstract, and therefore technology is a particularly suitable field for such raids. Metaphor does not, therefore, start with language but with a process or material object, and this is also a characteristic of LSP (it is the Purposes, not the Language, that are Specific). However, there is a contradiction

involved. It is required of a term that it should have singularity, a one-to-one signification, but it is in the nature of literature to offer multiple meanings. This subverts the stability of the term. In response, it could be said that technolects are themselves often largely of metaphorical derivation, and that terms may have multiple significations *in different fields* . A word like *gaff*, which is used by telephone linesmen, butchers, fishermen, and others for different implements, has a specific meaning in each field, and a generic similarity (that of *hooked metal*) in each incarnation.

My concern in this article is with a sketch by the British dramatist Harold Pinter, *Trouble in the Works* (1959), which makes extensive use of the terminology of machine parts. Pinter is often regarded as the 'English Becket', a master of non-communication, and the adjective 'Pinteresque' has entered the language with this conotation. However, it is a misnomer, since he is fascinated with words and wordgames, and this sketch demonstrates how he is able to draw on the rich technolect of a whole segment of industry, the manufacture of machine tools, and make it accessible for more traditional literary purposes.

Trouble in the Works , as its name suggests, is about a factory dispute. However, we are already alerted to a new set of signifiers by the title. As all translators, for example, are or should be aware, titles and headlines in English nearly always contain double signification - in short, a pun. In this case the slightly unexpected *Trouble in the Works* (where at would be more usual) alerts us to another meaning of *works*, machinery, and perhaps of a third meaning, that of bodily functions (as in *Poor chap, he's having trouble with his waterworks*).

The sketch is, in fact, a multilevel celebration of the names of machine parts, and in this respect it anticipates Pinter's *The Caretaker* (1960). In this, his best-known play, two of the three main characters make an informed use of technical terms in establishing their dramatic identities. Mick's interest in furnishings and interior decoration, and Aston's in portable drills and different types of saw blade for building his never-to-be-finished garden shed, are an integral part of their

characterisation, which is partly obsessive but also substantially derived from the world of the self-employed worker.

Trouble in the Works features a short exchange between a skilled worker, perhaps a foreman, and a manager in a factory producing precision tools. To the manager's mounting chagrin and dismay, the worker reveals a large measure of discontent among the workforce over the whole range of products, which are itemised in great detail. The comedy arises at one level from incongruity, particularly from the unexpectedness of a display of emotion over commonplace machine parts which would be more appropriate, or expected, in the context of interpersonal relations. This emotion is expressed in the form of maudlin affection on one side (the manager's), gross contempt on the other. It is, of course, a truism of Western literary practice that such usage is inappropriate in technical passages, but there is evidence that this is not universal, as shown by this excerpt from a Japanese motorcycle handbook: "Assembly of Japanese bike require (*sic*) great peace of mind" (Pirsig 1976: 158).

The major part of the comedy, however, is linguistic and rooted in the terms themselves. It is achieved, for example, at the phonological level. There are, for example, eight different stress and intonation patterns in sequence for the lowly *rod ends* :

WILLS: There's the hemi unibal spherical ROD end.
FIBBS: The HEMI UNIBAL SPHERICAL ROD END? Where could you find a FINER rod end?
WILLS: There are ROD ends and ROD ends, Mr Fibbs.
FIBBS: I KNOW there are rod ends and rod ends. But where could you find a finer hemi unibal SPHERICAL rod end? (1968: 122. My emphasis).

This is a forceful reminder that most LSP is spoken, and specifically undermines the common assumption that it is phonetically featureless.

Another significant part of the effect occurs at a lexical level. Very complex noun phrases, of a kind common in Finnish but usually considered rare in English, are effortlessly and familiarly wielded in a rapid exchange:

WILLS: Well, I hate to say it, but they've gone very vicious about the high speed taper shank spiral flute reamers.

FIBBS: The high speed taper shank spiral flute reamers! But that's absolutely ridiculous! What could they possibly have against thehigh speed taper shank spiral flute reamers?

WILLS: All I can say is they're in a state of very bad agitation about them. And then there's the gunmetal side outlet relief with handwheel. (1968: 122-123)

Pinter's use of LSP does not, of course, derive from an inward experience of the occupation group itself. The terms are evidently derived from a catalogue of manual of precision tools. However, he has assimilated an important element in the use of terms for specifications, that they are used not to describe but to distinguish :

WILLS: They hate and detest your lovely parallel male stud couplings, and the straight flange pump connectors, and *back nuts, and front nuts, and he bronzedraw off cock with handwheel and the bronzedraw offcock without handwheel!*
(1968 : 123. My italics).

Finally, a large part of the comedy derives from the metaphorical status of these terms. Such status among terms from metalworking is very familiar. The transition from *molten lead* to *molten sunlight* and then *a molten political speech* has long been made. Furthermore, Mircea Eliade has shown the close relationship between metalworking, sexual reproduction and obstetrics since earliest times. Metalworkers were seen as midwives assisting at the birth of precious alloys and tools (another potent metaphor). The tools are rendered living by being sexualised (Lloyd 1975 : 196). By a familiar folkloric process, what was solemn and ritualistic becomes comic, but it retains much of its earlier force as erotic metaphor.

In *Trouble in the Works* , Pinter has bound such use of metaphor closely to the actual parameters of word formation. For example, terms in all languages are derived by analogy from gender features : thus there are references to *nippled connectors* and *male elbow adaptors* (1968 : 123).

Other words simply have an additional sexual connotation : *brass pet cock* , *rod ends* , *my lovely parallel male stud couplings*, and of course the parting sally *brandy balls* (1968 : 122-123).

Pinter has recognised the often fetishistic attitude to machinery, with a strong dose of male fantasy, within the occupation group, and the way this is reflected in language. Terms, of course, serve rather than master society, and therefore continue to reflect hegemonic structures within society itself. It may be in acknowledgement of this that literary texts that make an informed use of LSP, drawing on the wide precedent of oral literature, are on the increase.

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